

Teaching English as a Foreign Language: tools and resources for the modern TEFL teacher

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Abstract: Teaching a foreign language is a tricky business, and it is not as straightforward as one could suspect. Even though you will be teaching something you have learnt during a life time, the way of teaching and the cultural differences you may encounter will make this a very tough task. In this article, useful tools and resources are presented. The aim is for this article to serve as a guide for new teachers of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

Keywords: TEFL, English as a second language, English, teaching

Introduction

Teaching English to non English speakers is a very daunting task. English speakers take for granted that everybody else in the world know English. In addition, cultural differences may cause problems. This guide of resources is not intended to be a stand-alone guide, but an aid to already-trained teachers. There are excellent teacher training programs for TEFL, that go beyond the scope of this article.

Tool and resources

Each of the following tools and resources has plenty of material to prepare your English classes for foreigners. You will never need to use all of them.

Teaching kids

In this section you will find lesson plans, activities, stories & poems, songs and CLIL activities for teachers of young learners in the primary classroom.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-kids/resources>

Teaching teens

This section is dedicated to teachers of teenagers. Find lesson plans, activities, stories and poems, articles and teaching tools to help you in your teenage classroom.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-teens>

Teaching adults

Lesson plans, activities and practical articles for English language teachers of adults.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-adults>

Teacher development

The teacher development section includes information about our training courses, our CPD framework, publications, research database and many other resources to help with professional development.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teacher-development>

Activities

Free, downloadable, ready-to-use activities and worksheets for your classes.

<http://www.eslbase.com/worksheets>

LESSON PLANS, IDEAS AND CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES

<http://www.eslbase.com/teaching/lesson-plans/>

ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Need help with a grammar rule, or maybe just a reminder? Choose a grammar point below for form, meaning, pronunciation, examples and teaching ideas.

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<http://www.eslbase.com/grammar/>

YOUNG LEARNERS

Teaching Children Grammar Through Games, Motivating Children to Learn English, Staying in Control of a Large Class

<http://www.eslbase.com/teaching/young-learners/>

TEFL A to Z

Complete guide to TEFL

<http://www.eslbase.com/tefl-a-z/>

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

<http://www.eslbase.com/teaching/theory/>

Teaching business English

<http://www.eslbase.com/teaching/business-english/>

PRODUCTIVE AND RECEPTIVE SKILLS

<http://www.eslbase.com/productive-receptive-skills/>

TEFL.net

My favorite tool here is the simple “worksheet generator” for ESL teachers who need to prep an exercise in a hurry. The site is also one of the biggest resources for lesson plans, ready-made worksheets, reading exercises and games. The site’s “English Planner” section has a fun selection of daily class warm-ups too, such as slang of the day and cartoon of the day. In addition, you’ll find a good library of articles on teaching tips and ESL methodology.

<http://www.tefl.net/>

ESL TEACHER RESOURCES

Teacher resources including free ESL handouts and quizzes, PDF lesson plans, teacher articles and a directory of teaching and reference resources. Also provides access to questions from students and teaching forum topics.

<http://www.usingenglish.com/teachers/>

Handouts Online

Fantastic EFL / ESL worksheets ready to print. Conversation, business, idioms and grammar. Use them in your classes today!

<http://www.handoutsonline.com/index.php>

Teaching resources

<https://www.oxfordseminars.com/esl-teaching-resources/>

Open English for English teachers

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/>

Study Zone

This site, from the University of Victoria, has clear, concise grammar lessons. Readings come with interactive comprehension questions and tasks.

<http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/courses/elc/studyzone/>

Label Me! –

This resource of printable worksheets is great for teaching new vocabulary. It has images for students to label and, if they’re feeling creative, to expand on (“now draw a mirror on the bedroom wall... now draw a cat under the table.”) These handouts would suit a range of levels, and the site has a hefty selection of holiday-themed worksheets.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/label/simple.shtml>

Ello –

This site is a great resource for audio clips, categorized by topic, level, and speakers’ accents. I dig this site for providing a great mix of accents. It’s not just native speakers chatting; you won’t find any cheesy dialogues like “Angus and Jeremy compare Scottish and American holidays!” Instead, the dialogues have accented English from a mix of native and non-native speakers. This is a smart practice in my books, as in many situations English functions as the lingua franca of the world.

<http://www.ello.org/english/>

TEFL Tunes –

This is a bank of song-based lessons, with an easy browser where teachers can search by level, theme, artist or grammatical point. Using “If You Don’t Know Me by Now” to teach the first conditional? Cool. These activities are a great way to frame song-listening activities around lessons, as opposed to just playing music in class for the sake of it.

<http://www.tefltunes.com/grammarsongs.aspx>

Musical English Lessons

This site is a bit jumbled format-wise, but it offers scores of free worksheets with ready-made lyric gapfills. There’s a long list of artists, and each lyric sheet has tips on how to use the song in class. I’m keen to try, “Do You Want to Know a Secret?” for reported speech or maybe even “Whenever, Wherever” to practice gerunds and infinitives.

<http://www.musicalenglishlessons.org/music-index.htm>

English Club

English Club’s talking point worksheets are mini lessons with a huge range of subjects. There are topics like biofuel and

kidnapping for your more serious lessons, and topics such as shopping for lighter discussions. Each lesson includes a bit of vocabulary and a dense list of discussion questions related to the topic.

<https://www.englishclub.com/esl-worksheets/conversation/>

Tall Tales

This bank of “did they really happen?” stories has a good selection of offbeat reads about topics like animal heroism and dumb burglars. The content reminds me of Reader’s Digest; it’s nothing groundbreaking, but the mass appeal is great for structuring classroom activities. Some stories have a good deal of supplementary exercises for students.

<http://strangenewsstories.eslreading.org/home/sitemap.html>

Academic English Cafe

This is a good source for creative writing prompts. As the name suggests, this material is better for high-school or older, as the topics get abstract. It’s high-level but good stuff.

<http://www.academicenglishcafe.com/>

Online Writing Lab (OWL)

Purdue’s writing lab has great resources for writing resumes and professional documents. This site is a very handy tool for university students and adults seeking work in an English-speaking country.

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/678/01/>

The Internet TESL Journal

The journal offers a hefty collection of lesson plans categorized by target skill (reading, culture, icebreakers). Plans are submitted by site users, so they vary a fair bit in terms of content and structure. Still, there are great materials here. The site hosts many abstract lesson topics (modern art, manners) that would suit secondary students and adults learners.

<http://iteslj.org/Lessons/>

Using English

This site has a long list of pdf lesson plans for different levels. This is one of the few sites with test prep materials which are crucial for English language learners looking to study abroad. You’ll find IELTS prep lessons and reading exercises based on the Cambridge ESOL. Using English also has printable online quizzes on a mix of grammar-based and general topics.

<http://www.usingenglish.com/>

ESL Galaxy

Here is a bank of (wait for it...) over two thousand printable worksheets, mostly for beginner and intermediate students.

The materials include games and puzzles, holiday exercises and readings with comprehension activities. There are also free PowerPoint presentations that are mostly suited for young learners.

<http://www.esl-galaxy.com/>

Super Simple Songs

I absolutely love these songs and their simple, bouncy videos. The lyrics seem basic, but they’re always a huge hit with younger learners. Play a video in class and your students will be mesmerized, gold for classes that tend to get unruly. “Uh-huh” is a student favourite that will get stuck in your head for weeks.

<http://supersimplelearning.com/>

Comic Creator

If your students enjoy creative activities, the comic creator is a great way to structure and illustrate the stories they write. They can design each panel with backgrounds, characters, and speech bubbles. It’s very fun; you can try it with adult students too.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comic/index.html>

Armored Penguin

This site makes word searches, crossword puzzles, and word jumbles. It’s very easy to use and has ready-made puzzles that change daily. It’s also a source of classroom conversation starters, like optical illusions and funny quotes.

<http://www.armoredpenguin.com/>

Lanternfish/Bogglesworld

Here you’ll find a collection of ready-to-print flashcards, worksheets and puzzles: a great resource for kids. A lot of material is centered around Western holidays, so come to this site first if you’re planning a Halloween lesson.

<http://bogglesworldesl.com/>

Puzzlemaker

The mother of all puzzle-makers, Puzzlemaker has the standard crosswords and word searches, plus cryptograms, letter phrases, and all sorts of puzzles I haven’t seen since leafing through my Nana’s Large-Print Super Stumpers. My students in South Korea can’t get enough of the puzzles.

<http://www.discovereducation.com/free-puzzlemaker/?CFID=10458696&CFTOKEN=32289894>

BBC Learning English

This is one mega-resource. It hosts grammar, quizzes, lesson plans based on current events and a deliciously British

animated series called “The Flatmates” for English learners. It’s a great site if you teach adult ESL classes, as it has sections for teaching business English and lessons framed around practical life skills like renting an apartment and riding the subway.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/>

Breaking News English

Here, you’ll find whole lesson plans with vocabulary, discussion questions and more on current event news articles. It’s all for intermediate/high-intermediate learners, but text can be edited and simplified for lower levels. Great material for adults/teens.

<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/>

Business English Materials

These are quite literally English lessons about businesses. A partner site of Breaking News English, it has lesson plans about dozens of different successful companies from Apple to Zara. Lessons include readings, games, comprehension activities and quizzes.

<http://www.businessenglishmaterials.com/>

Postscript

Linguarama’s Postscript magazine offers mini-lessons and worksheets. Look under “Themes” for lessons categorized under very precise headings like management, banking, and marketing. It’s straightforward stuff, best for ESL classes that are intermediate and higher.

<http://www.linguarama.com/ps/index.htm>

Aardvark's EFL Resources

A surreal name for a helpful site packed with teacher, student and dictionary links. It also boasts some great practice exercises. It also has general links to a wide-selection of mono- and bi-lingual dictionaries and other reference works.

<http://www.englishforum.com/00/>

Adam Rado's English Learning Fun

A pay site - \$5 a month - which gives access to numerous fun activities all geared to get the visitor involved through cloze exercises, film-based projects and multiple choice work. The Movie Talk section features distorted images of Hollywood stars and distorted sentences that must be unravelled before the image can be restored. There are some great multiple choice pages based on amusing animations. There is a page dedicated to 'mouth manglers' or problematic consonants.

<http://www.elfs.com/>

British Tourist Authority

The text of this colourful and efficient site is available in

numerous languages. There is a helpful learning English section and an intriguing 'images of Britain' resource. It provides a fascinating insight into the way the nation is being represented abroad.

<https://www.visitbritain.com/gb/en/visitbritain>

Cambridge University Press

Excellent resources for classroom teachers. This site holds online student activities, teaching tips and the online Cambridge International Dictionaries of words, phrases and idioms. Their dictionary-based activities incorporate imaginative graphics with helpful interactive tests.

<http://www.cambridge.org/gb/cambridgeenglish>

Dave's ESL Cafe

This is deservedly one of the best known and most visited TEFL internet sites. It is well designed and easy to negotiate. The home page boasts the banner 'Where English Is Fun' and the contents live up to this promise. Use the Cafe's huge links page as a jumping-off point to other good resources or browse its own pages of lesson plans and ideas. You can check out the phrasal verb section from 'act up' to 'zonk out' or get a real kick out of the idioms section. There are also a mass of discussion forums.

<http://www.eslcafe.com/>

Englishclub.net

This is an excellent site with a wide-range of resources and links. As well as numerous grammar revision exercises, there is a colourful games room where all visitors can become hooked on the delights of hangman. Surf the teacher contribution pages, which are crammed with good lesson plans.

<https://www.englishclub.com/>

English to Go

Ready-made lessons based around Reuters news articles. A six-month subscription costs \$20 but there is a free weekly lesson and warmer with student worksheets and teachers' notes.

<http://www.english-to-go.com/index.cfm>